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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000499

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR G/TIP, DRL, IWI, NEA/ARP,
CAIRO FOR STEVE BONDY
LONDON FOR ETHAN GOLDRICH

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SUBJECT: RIGHTS ACTIVIST'S ARREST - THE GOB BEHAVES POORLY

REF: A. MANAMA 237

1B. 03 MANAMA 02980

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Robert S. Ford for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. In order to derail an NGO's plan to embarrass the GOB during Bahrain's April 4 Grand Prix race, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) arrested a human rights activist on March 30 for alleged un-Islamic behavior and indecency. In the process the GOB denied the activist his right to legal counsel. In its attempt to defame the activist, the GOB broke its own laws and released his name and particulars of his case to the local press. The Government's handling of this arrest is a message to Bahraini NGOs that the Government can revert to tough behavior reminiscent of the 1990s when activists try to embarrass the government. END SUMMARY.

THE POLICE VERSION

12. (C) On March 30, Bahraini police detained President of the National Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture (NCMVT) Abdularouf Abdullah Ahmed Al-Shayeb on charges of un-Islamic behavior and indecency. Al-Shayeb prior to his arrest had been trying to organize a protest against torture in Bahrain on April 4, the day of the Grand Prix race. Subsequent to his arrest, the Public Prosecutor ordered him held for one week. According to an RSO source, the employer of an Indonesian housemaid had learned from another Bahraini that a stranger had been visiting his housemaid daily while the employer was at work. At the employer's request, the police monitored his home. On March 30 a man was seen entering the maid's quarters. The police raided the quarters and discovered the Indonesian housemaid and the man, both naked. The police took the man, later identified as Al-Shayeb, into custody. The housemaid claimed that she was having a sexual relationship with Al-Shayeb.

AL SHAYEB's VERSION

13. (C) Contrary to the police account, Al-Shayeb told Poloff that the GOB had assigned two cars to shadow him since his return from Geneva where he met with the United Nations Committee on Torture on March 28. On March 30, Al-Shayeb made a visit to the Al Fattah Training Institute when two men grabbed him as he walked back to his car. They brought him to a nearby house where another man dragged an Indonesian housemaid to the front yard. Al-Shayeb asserted that she had been slapped around, and that she identified Al-Shayeb as a man with whom she had been sleeping. He was quickly arrested and brought directly to CID for interrogation. At the interrogation, a policeman covered Al-Shayeb's head. Then a man started insulting him and demanding answers. Al-Shayeb alleged that he immediately recognized the voice of former Interior Minister official Adel Flaifel, having been tortured by him in the past. Al-Shayeb claims that Flaifel threatened to cut out his tongue. At that moment Al-Shayeb uncovered his own head and saw Flaifel, who quickly left the interrogation room. Al-Shayeb insists that he was never in the housemaid's quarters, never had any type of relationship with the woman, and claimed that he would never risk his marriage to have an affair with someone so unattractive.

THE GOB BEHAVES POORLY

14. (C) For the five days Al-Shayeb was held in jail, the GOB denied him access to legal representation. Human rights activist Adel Al-Abassi told Poloff on April 3 that Al-Shayeb was denied legal counsel because the GOB feared he might be able to give the go-ahead to his Committee to stage a protest during the Grand Prix race. Al-Abassi predicted that the GOB would release Al-Shayeb on the day of the race, preventing Al-Shayeb from organizing an NCMVT demonstration that would have embarrassed the GOB. Bahrain Center for Human Rights

President Nabeel Rajab told PolOff on April 2 that the Ministry of Interior (MOI) panicked and had Al-Shayeb arrested to guarantee nothing would happen. In an attempt to defame Al-Shayeb, the GOB leaked Al-Shayeb's name and the particulars of the case to the local press. The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice, Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al-Khalifa, confirmed to P/E Chief on April 4 that it is illegal in alleged vice cases to divulge the name and nature of a case until a verdict is handed down. Shaikh Khalid said that the Ministry of Information must have leaked Al-Shayeb's information to the press, since the Ministry of Justice is under strict instructions not to divulge such information.

15. (C) COMMENT. We find Al-Shayeb a character of dubious reliability; even our other human rights contacts admit that the story about the Indonesian housemaid has questions on all sides. Moreover, this is the first time we have heard of the infamous Adel Flaifel returning to the Ministry of Interior. That said, there is less question about how the government moved to detain and stop the activist; certainly the police acted on a vice tip with far greater than usual enthusiasm. The GOB's only focus this week was to ensure the success of the widely-watched Grand Prix event. The GOB warned all NGOs and the opposition that it would not allow disruptions of any kind. Al-Shayeb was the only activist unwilling to stand down. The GOB appears to have decided it could not risk ignoring Al-Shayeb's threat to organize a protest in full view of the racing audience. (The NCMTV had embarrassed the GOB in the past by declaring National Martyr's Day the day after Bahrain's National Day, staging a televised demonstration with over 2500 in attendance - see ref b.) In recent months the GOB has reacted harshly to make sure the hard-line opposition here understands the Government will react toughly when confronting efforts to embarrass it internationally. In so doing, the Government is moving a step backwards in the protection of the right of assembly in Bahrain. END COMMENT.

FORD